

HOUSE RESOLUTION 45

By Bulso

A RESOLUTION recognizing the Natchez Trace Bridge Barrier Coalition.

WHEREAS, suicide is one of the most disruptive and tragic events a family and a community can experience, and each year, more than 1,000 lives are lost to suicide in Tennessee, with an estimated eight to twenty-five attempted suicides for each suicide death; and

WHEREAS, as of 2022, at least forty-two people have died after stepping over a thirty-two-inch railing and falling 155 feet from the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge in Williamson County, which spans Tennessee Highway 96 and Birdsong Hollow and falls under federal jurisdiction with the National Park Service; and

WHEREAS, public awareness of the role that the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge has in this tragic problem is the key to preventing further suffering and loss of life; the risk for human self-destruction can be reduced through awareness, education, and treatment, as the highest risk for suicide is among the survivors of those who died by suicide or those who have attempted suicide; and

WHEREAS, the Natchez Trace Bridge Barrier Coalition was formed in 2018 by Trish Merelo, after the loss of her son, and Sarah Elmer, after the loss of her sister, and has as its goal the addition of a protective barrier and/or netting critical to saving lives; and

WHEREAS, soon after its formation, the Natchez Trace Bridge Barrier Coalition, full of family members who lost loved ones at the bridge, urged the National Park Service to put barriers on the bridge, arguing that the bridge's railing needed to be raised or have a prevention measure in place; and

WHEREAS, the addition of physical safety measures to the bridge posed an engineering challenge, as any barriers must be designed in such a manner as to keep the bridge from bearing too much weight; the National Park Service ultimately hired an outside group to explore its feasibility in 2020; and

WHEREAS, in the summer of 2022, a temporary chain link fence topped with barbed wire was added to the bridge in an effort to prevent people from jumping off the span, and a permanent barrier remains in the design phase through the National Park Service; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Natchez Trace Bridge Barrier Coalition should be specially recognized for their diligent efforts on behalf of suicide prevention; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor and commend the members of the Natchez Trace Bridge Barrier Coalition for their successful campaign to encourage the National Park Service to erect safety barriers along the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.